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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: MANDINGO LEADER AND FORMER WARLORD ALHAJI KROMAH ON
POLITICS AND THE TRC

REF: 10 MONROVIA 164

CLASSIFIED BY: Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B),
(D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. In a meeting with Ambassador on February 17, Alhaji G.V. Kromah, leader of the United Liberation Movement in Liberia for Democracy - Kromah (ULIMO-K) faction during Liberia's civil war, offered some criticisms of President Sirleaf's political decisions, while indicating a willingness to join the Sirleaf government if asked. Kromah, who is recommended for prosecution in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report, contended that the TRC process was questionable and challenged the integrity of the final report. He also stressed the influence that USG representatives continue to hold among Liberia's politicians and people. END SUMMARY.

THOUGHTS ON SIRLEAF'S DECISION TO RUN IN 2011

12. (C) Former ULIMO-K faction leader, All Liberia Coalition Party (ALCOP) standard bearer, 1997 and 2005 ALCOP presidential candidate, and 2009 ALCOP Senatorial candidate in the Montserrado by-election Alhaji G.V. Kromah called on the Ambassador on February 17. When the Ambassador asked about Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's recent decision to contest the 2011 presidential election (reftel), Kromah responded that he would be "quiet until it was necessary to talk." He did, however, admit that Sirleaf's announcing her intent to seek re-election during her January 25 annual message to the legislature was not a violation of the law because her decision is an integral part of the country's political agenda.

KROMAH CRITICAL OF THE PRESIDENT'S CHOICES....

13. (C) Kromah asserted that 2011 would truly be Liberia's first real election, but he wants to know what is next on the president's agenda. Sirleaf has the opportunity to lay out an agenda for her next term, but she is overwhelmed by the task of running the country -- "too many priorities, so no priority." In Kromah's view, the president is "afraid" of everyone in Liberia, which explains the large number of Liberian diasporans brought into her administration from abroad. These officials, who had little to no role in the civil conflict and were perceived as untainted, are now being knocked out of government by Sirleaf for corruption. Kromah said this is a vote of no confidence in the president's judgment.

¶4. (C) Kromah asked the Ambassador to encourage President Sirleaf to strengthen her cabinet by adding more Liberians who remained in-country during the conflict years. He asserted that National Security Advisor (NSA) H. Boima Fahnbulleh is underutilized and would make an excellent Minister of Foreign Affairs. Kromah also called Dominic Tarpeh, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the University of Liberia, a man of substance who could be put to use in government.

...BUT STILL WILLING TO HELP

¶5. (C) When asked about his rumored candidacy for the vacant Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism position, Kromah admitted that he had not yet been approached, but would accept if asked and believed the Senate would confirm him quickly. (NOTE: The president's office announced the appointment of Cletus Sieh as the new minister on February 25. END NOTE.) Kromah cited up to 15 legislators as his former law students at the University of Liberia, including Grand Cape Mount County Senator Abel M. Massalay and Grand Kru County Senator Blamo Nelson. Kromah is, he said, ultimately prepared to be on the president's team. Sirleaf is a distant cousin and he thinks highly of her. The two meet

regularly, according to Kromah, despite their political differences. In fact, Kromah said, he threw his majority-Muslim Mandingo ethnic group's support behind ruling Unity Party candidate Clemenceau Urey in the November 2009 Montserrado County by-election run off because President Sirleaf promised to make Ramadan a national holiday. He also traveled with the President on her last trip to Libya.

VIEWS ON THE TRC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

¶6. (C) When asked about the TRC's recommendations, Kromah said that he believes they are unenforceable and only the National Elections Commission (NEC) can decide whether or not individuals are eligible to run for public office. (NOTE: Despite several complaints to the NEC, the Commission ruled that Kromah could run in the recent Senatorial by-election even though he was listed in the TRC report. END NOTE.) The TRC, Kromah thinks, did not follow due legal process and the integrity of the final report is questionable, in light of the public, dissenting statements among the TRC Commissioners regarding the intent of the report. Kromah questions the fact that certain people were not named in the report despite their past roles in Liberia's civil conflict, specifically NSA Fahnbulleh, Liberty Party Standard Bearer Charles Brumskine and Governance Commission chair Amos Sawyer. Kromah suggested the absence of the aforementioned individuals may be due to their influence over TRC commissioners. He noted TRC Chairman Jerome Verdier as a protege of Brumskine, and Commissioner Massa Washington as a protege of Sawyer.

¶7. (C) Regarding reconciliation, Kromah said that most of those indicted by the TRC report had apologized for their actions, but there is still a need to hold a "palaver hut" process in each county if the country is to move forward. (NOTE: Kromah is one of eight Liberians recommended for prosecution for human rights violations in the TRC report. End Note.)

BACK TO WAR?

17. (C) The Ambassador then asked Kromah if the country could go back to war. Kromah's response was vague, but he stressed the important role played by the U.S. in Liberia and that all overtures and nuances from USG officials and international partners send loud messages to the Liberian people.

COMMENT

18. (C) President Sirleaf is likely courting Kromah because of his considerable influence over the Muslim-majority Mandingo ethnic group, one of Liberia's most cohesive communities. We are not aware of any familial ties between Sirleaf and Kromah, either by blood or marriage. By describing her as his "cousin," he is likely referring to their common roots in Bomi County and their common cause against Charles Taylor. Lawyer by training, journalist by profession and warlord by experience, Kromah is a complex personality, one of many once decent people who were rendered evil by the war. That President Sirleaf, and even we, have to continue to deal with these people demonstrates the fragile state of Liberia's reconciliation.

ROBINSON